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RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6735
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RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3086
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7620
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1690
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5027
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: US/Syria, Syria/Lebanon, Syria/Israel, Iraq, Lebanon,
Palestinian Territories, US/Iran (4/16)

11. Summary: Independent al-Watan on Apr. 16 reported a meeting arranged by the State Department with Arab reporters in Washington with Alberto Fernandez, of the Near East Bureau at the State Department, who denied that there is any new dialogue between Syria and the US, but said that "there might be something new." "We are worried about the behavior of the Syrian government regarding some issues, especially in Lebanon and Iraq," the US diplomat said. "The problem is that the Syrian government has not changed its behavior, in spite of the flexibility that it shows regarding peace with Israel. If there is a problem, it is due to wrong advice that has been given to the Syrian leadership encouraging it to implement a confrontational policy, encourage discord and send fighters to Iraq." Fernandez said that the US admits "that Syria is important, and has economic and political potential to play a leading role in the Arab world; we especially need Arab and regional leadership in the region, not only Saudi leadership."

Independent al-Watan also quoted Western diplomatic sources as saying that Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Sultanov will visit Syria this week to discuss with President Asad and Syrian officials attempts to establish the international tribunal on the al-Hariri assassination under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter and to send an international inspection commission to the Lebanese-Syrian border.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Washington: Syria must play a leading role in the Arab world. The US State Department accuses Arabs of hypocrisy towards the Palestinian issue and of rejoicing in events in Iraq" (Independent al-Watan, 4/16)

"The Palestinian government endorses formation of the National Security Council. The Abbas-Olmert meeting achieves no results" (Independent 4/16)

"Abbas precedes his meeting with Abbas by claiming openness towards the Arab initiative" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/16)

"Zebari discusses preparations for the Iraq Neighboring Countries

Conference. Al-Sadr bloc withdraws from the government"
(Independent al-Watan, 4/16)

"Lebanese Opposition: There is no possibility of reconciliation with the governing team... No confidence in the US-formed tribunal" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/16)

"European MPs reiterate the importance of national accord among Lebanese. Lebanese figures: We have no trust in a US-formed tribunal" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/16)

"Two British military helicopters crash north of Baghdad, killing two UK and four US soldiers" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/16)

"If Pelosi wants to visit Iran, her request can be studied. Iran seeks to establish two new nuclear plants (Independent al-Watan, 4/16)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Close and Remote Peace"

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/16): "Never has Syria been ready to talk about negotiations under the table, simply because it does not have to do such a thing. A country that seeks peace and that has a right supported by international resolutions and by history and geography, and above all by a solid resolve, does not have to accept a peace dialogue under the table.

"Actions that take place 'behind the scenes' and in the 'dark' are shameful. Syria does not consider peace to be a shameful act unless it entails surrender and concessions, which Damascus will never offer either covertly or overtly....

"Olmert's government is too weak to take courageous steps for peace. This was clear in the confused Israeli reaction to the Arab peace plan, which ranged between partial and total rejection. There were also serious attempts to modify the Arab plan and render it essentially hollow.

"The other point is that the United States is not interested in peace. Observers can see that the Bush Administration, which incites wars, conflicts, and sedition, has not taken a single step toward peace....

"Peace needs courage and will, which, we believe, Olmert's government lacks. Israel has always claimed that it has no 'partner' for peace. But the fact is that Arabs are the ones who do not find a peace partner. Peace will get closer if there is an Israeli-American will, but will move far away if Israel and the United States continue the same policy, which is hostile to peace and the efforts that seek to achieve it."

"Striking at the Army Establishment"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/16): "France and the United States are seeking to push the situation in Lebanon in particular, and Syrian-Lebanese relations in general, toward further tension.... This does not serve the interests of Lebanon or stability in the region....

"The French-American talk about smuggling weapons across the border is not supported by any evidence. The two countries should accept the Lebanese Army's statement, which denied any weapon smuggling, not the lies of Israel, which always works to undermine Lebanon's independence, the independence that Paris and Washington falsely claim they want to assert.

"The Lebanese Army's discovery of a weapons depot for the Samir

Jeajea-led Lebanese Forces Party clearly shows from where weapons are smuggled into Lebanon and who sponsors this smuggling and provides cover for it....

"The French-American silence on the governing team's effort to arm its militias can only be explained as support for this team's obvious attempt to ignite civil war. It is also proof that the two sides are directly involved in providing this team with weapons...."

"Ungrateful Individuals, Civil War,
and the Future of Lebanon"

Muhyi-al-Din Muhammad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, commented (4/16): "On the occasion of the anniversary of the Lebanese civil war, only ungrateful and rancorous individuals would forget Syria's sacrifices for the sake of Lebanon....

"Syria lost about 15,000 soldiers in its effort to stop the Lebanese civil war and bring peace back to Lebanon.... The Lebanese people realize what Syria did and are doing everything in their power to prevent Jumblatt, Jeajea, and other forces that are linked to Israel, from reigniting the civil war....

"The current conflict in Lebanon is between a handful of individuals who have linked their interests to the American-Zionist plan that targets Lebanon and the whole region, and forces that have dedicated themselves to serving Lebanon, its sovereignty, and its Arab affiliation...."

"Preconditions"

Ali Nasrallah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/16): "President Bush has set preconditions for his talks with Democrats on Iraq....

"President Bush invited Democratic Congressional leaders to a meeting on Iraq not to negotiate with them or to find a settlement, but to tell them, as the White House spokesman said, that it is not logical to set arbitrary dates for withdrawal from Iraq, and to ask them to grant him carte blanche for an endless war....

"If Bush, who claims to be one of the most prominent advocates of democracy in the world, wants to demolish democracy in his own country and to go against the majority and world public opinion, then it is legitimate to ask about the nature of the democracy that he wants to export to the world and whether it brings anything other than further death and destruction....

"The Bush administration is really one of the biggest forgers of facts and concepts. In its attempt to blame Democrats for the defeat in Iraq unless they approve a clean budget bill, this administration seeks to tie the hands of the Congressional majority and to undermine the foundations of US democracy. Democrats intend to confront these attempts and put an end to the Administration's futile actions and the damage it is causing to US interests...."

Corbin